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Also the passage is short, for we may goe thither in thirtie or fortie dayes at the most, having but an indifferent winde, and return continually in twenty or foure and twentie dayes at the most' (III, 178).

Hakluyt describes the temperate climate³ of Virginia, her abundant viands,⁴ the free life,⁵ as in the golden age, and ease of advancement⁶ there, and the southern route⁷ to the colony, much as they are described in the play; but the resemblances are not definite enough to justify quotation. In general, to observe that the three authors founded on fact even a sailor's exaggerated description of Virginia again reminds us how much writers of travel have aided dramatists and poets.

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A NOTE ON *Il Penseroso*

The references to Hermes and to Plato (*Il Penseroso*, 85-95) in the description of the night's reading of the contemplative man deserve more careful annotation than they have hitherto received. Editors more familiar with Plato than with Hermes have contented themselves with a note identifying Hermes, mentioning the association with his name of the Hermetic philosophy, and suggesting that the following verses refer to Plato's *Phædo*.

A careful reading of the latter does not, however, justify the annotation. Though Plato does discuss the probable dwellings of excarnate souls, he does not, either in the *Phædo* or elsewhere, describe the dæmons of fire, air, water, and earth, who are connected with the planets. His reticence in this regard has apparently been noticed by some of the more conscientious editors, who hazard a conjecture that in verses 93-96 we have a reference to some medieval speculation. Thus Todd suggests "some reference to the Gothick system of Demons, which is a mixture of Platonism, school divinity, and Christian superstition." This opinion is echoed by Masson, and by several other modern editors. To none of them apparently has it occurred that the reference is to the Hermetic writings previously alluded to in verse 88.

That, however, appears to be made evident by a reading of the extant Hermetic books. In *The Key* (14) we read, "Now from one source (αρχή) all things depend. . . . Three, then, are they: God, . . . Cosmos, and man." Of the Cosmos we are told (*The Perfect Sermon*, III, 1) "That, then, from which the whole Cosmos is formed consists of four elements—fire, water, earth, and air." Of the Cosmos, each of the strata or layers is peopled with daimons innumerable—"choirs of daimons," they are called (*Definitions of Asclepius to King Amon* 13). "And under Him is ranged the

³ III, 279.

⁴ III, 249.

⁵ III, 246, 248, 269, 273.

⁶ III, 153, 280.

⁷ III, 281

choir of daimons—or rather choirs; for these are multitudinous and very varied, ranked underneath the groups of stars (ὕπὸ τὰς τῶν ἀστέρων πλυνθίδας) in equal number with each one of them.” Through these daimons the stars exercise their influence upon the lives of men, controlling all the activities of earth, for, to use Milton’s phrase, their

power hath a true consent (connection)
With planet or with element.”

Of the daimons it is said (*Definitions of Asclepius to King Amon*, 14) “To all of these has been allotted the authority over things upon the earth; and it is they who bring about the confusion of the turmoils of earth—for states and nations generally, and for each individual separately.” Their chief function seems to be to act as God’s retributive agents. “They watch over the affairs of men, and work out things appointed by the Gods—by means of storms, whirlwinds and hurricanes, by transmutations wrought by fire and shakings of the earth, with famines also, and with wars requiting man’s impiety.”

From the foregoing citations, it is evident that the source of Milton’s ideas about the daimons was neither Plato nor medieval speculation, but the mixture of Neo-Platonic and Oriental mysticism now generally called the Hermetic philosophy.

Though speculative, this was certainly not medieval. It antedated considerably the earliest of the patristic writings, Justin Martyr about the middle of the second century A. D. classes Hermes “among the most ancient philosophers” (*Cohortatio ad Gentiles*, xxxviii). Of the other church fathers, nine quote more or less at length from the Hermetic books—Athenagoras, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Cyprian, Arnobius, Lactantius, Augustine, Cyril of Alexandria, and Suidas. It is noteworthy that Lactantius (*Divine Institutions*, I, 6, 1) seems to refer to the *Definitions of Asclepius to King Amon*, 15-16, cited above, in which the functions of the daimons are described.

The patristic writings were well known to Milton. Many of them he quotes in his prose works; and the *Common-place Book* preserved in the Cambridge manuscript contains no less than six citations from Lactantius. It is not improbable, therefore, that Milton’s interest in Hermes was awakened by his reading during the luminous holiday of the Horton period of the church fathers.¹

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¹ Milton’s reference to Hermes was much more intelligible in the seventeenth century than it is today. In Milton’s time Hermes’s name was one to conjure with, for it was regarded with the deepest reverence by the Rosicrucians; these and their faith in Hermes were stock themes for satire. See, for example Butler’s *Hudibras*, Part II, Canto III, 651 ff.